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Incorporating Essential Information System Skills in Technical Courses A Practical Approach to Teaching Those Elusive "Soft" Skills

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Workshop Abstract

To succeed in today's information systems (IS) environment, IS professionals need more than traditional technical skills. Technical and trade publications cite requests by managers for technical people with business and "soft" skills. Industry managers would like IS professionals to have strong backgrounds in a broad variety of "soft" skills such as written and oral communication and the ability to work in teams. Research in academic and professional journals indicates current computer science and information system curricula often do not address the skills managers seek.

However, the addition of a variety of simple activities to existing technical courses can provide students with valuable opportunities to develop such "soft" skills. The activities also assist students in understanding the technical materials by requiring them to apply advanced critical thinking skills. In addition, active learning can reach students with different learning styles and increase the understanding and retention of technical material. A mixture of activities also provides a variety of assessment opportunities which may more accurately reflect students' understanding of the material.

This workshop will expand on these themes and provide examples and practice developing assignments that can help prepare well-rounded students for futures in information systems.

Workshop Goals

1. Survey participant perceptions of the skills needed to succeed in information systems.
2. Increase awareness of skills requested by industry and in the literature.
3. Assist participants in an on-the-spot self-evaluation of their current curriculum for skills the information systems profession requires.
4. Discuss how activities designed to develop soft skills can re-enforce technical content and provide a brief review of the related literature.
5. Present practical examples of infusing soft skills into existing technical curriculum.
6. Encourage participants, working together, to design and share new course assignments.

Workshop includes activities, worksheets, handouts and discussion as well as presentations.